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ABSTRACT

The self-instructional language program (SILP) allows students to learn, through a guided individualized study program, a foreign language not offered in the regular university curriculum. A director for the program offers the facilities and materials necessary for administering such a program. A tutor, who is a native speaker of the target language, serves as a monitor and drill master for small groups of students. An outside examiner, who is a professional language instructor and an expert in the target language, examines the students at the end of the term and evaluates their achievement and assigns grades for the course. The examination procedures must be an integral part of SILP that is accepted by the students as a proper evaluation of their newly learned language skills and is not looked at simply as a mechanism by which grades are given on the basis of a single impression. The choice of a qualified examiner, consultation of director of SILP with the examiner, and a clear explanation of the function and procedures of the examination to both students and tutors, are necessary preliminary steps to ensure a successful completion of the individualized language study course. A sample of an examination in Modern Hebrew is included in the appendix to the paper. (Author/CLK)

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PRELIMINARIES AND PREPARATIONS FOR EXAMINATIONS: EXAMINER'S REPORT AND EVALUATION

Paper read at the 1975 NASILP Conference, held at Canisius College, Buffalo, New York, September 19-20, 1975

The self-instructional language program (SILP) is designed to offer students the opportunity to learr foreign languages not regularly offered as part of the university curriculum. This is accomplished by a guided individualized study. Not all language skills are equally emphasized in such programs, as most stress the practical command of the target language. The program is designed to meet the needs of students who want to use the language mainly for speaking purposes.

The undertaking of SILP involves a contractual relationship between students in academic institutions which offer such a program, and a director who is a person appointed to serve as the facilitator for such a program. The program director is obliged to supply all the necessary resources that the students must use during the period of learning, and to take steps to ensure the quality of the program and to maintain its standards, while the students take upon themselves a commitment to complete the study of a defined body of materials and to achieve a reasonable control over the assigned materials. The resources at the students' disposal are written and taped materials, as well as native speakers who serve as drill masters and monitors, and meet with students at regularly arranged times during the contracted period of study.

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This type of language program has the advantage of being a very flexible one, as students are able, within limits, to set their own goals and pace of learning. It also emphasizes the learning aspect rather than the instructional one, and shifts a great deal of responsibility to the learner. There are some problems which arise from its unique structure. The most significant of these problems is that of quality control of SILP. A very effective mechanism which has been built into many of these programs in order to assure the quality of the program, has been the active involvement of a qualified outside examiner who checks and evaluates the students' work at the end of each term of learning. The outside examiner is a person who has the proper academic credentials and qualifications and who is actively engaged in the instruction of the target language in a recognized academic institution. In order to complete the course of study and to receive academic credit for work done during the term, students must be examined at the end of the term by this language specialist. It is not only a process of evaluation of individual students' work, but it is also a process by which the standards and quality of the program are maintained.

The final examination which occupies but a short time (30-45 minutes) of the students' total experience with the study of the new language is one of the most meaningful procedures in SILP, and yet it is, without a doubt, one which generates a great deal of anxiety in students, who are not sure what to expect during such an examination. The fact that the students are not acquainted with the outside examiner is an important factor which contributes to that anxiety. The nature of

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the examination, an oral examination which involves instant responses, constitutes a source of concern as well. Not to be minimized is the apprehension due to the fact that the one performance during the term determines to a large extent the grade that the student receives.

It is important to see to it that students do not view the final examination as a major threat to them, but come to regard it as a meaningful test and evaluation of their newly acquired language skills. In order to alleviate the students' concerns and to help prepare them for the examination, it is necessary to explain to them in great detail the function of such an examination and the procedures likely to be used during its administration. It is also important to let the students understand that their performance does indeed reflect their accumulated knowledge acquired throughout the term, rather than being just an evaluation of a single performance. The tension in anticipating such an examination cannot be totally eliminated, but much of it can be alleviated by proper preparations.

The first step to be taken by the program director, whose responsibility is to coordinate all aspects of SILP, is the choice of an examiner. It is the director's responsibility, when offering such a program, to obtain the services of the best examiner available. This person will serve also as a consultant to the director offering suggestions for the improvement of the program, as well as assigning grades for individual performances. The director can choose an examiner from a roster of qualified examiners compiled by the National Association for Self Instructional Language Programs (NASILP), or contact an academic institution

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which offers in its regular program the instruction of the specific language to be offered in SILP and obtain the names of potential examiners. The criteria for choosing an examiner in a given language is not only proficiency in the language, but also professional qualifications for teaching the particular language, and an understanding of SILP, its goals and techniques. It is not sufficient to have native speakers with advanced academic degrees in other areas of study serve as examiners. An Iranian engineering professor is not qualified to test in Persian, nor is a Japanese sociologist the proper person to be the language examiner in Japanese (unfortunately, these types of people have been used by few universities in the capacity of examiners, to the detriment of the program).

Once the proper choice of an examiner has been made, the director must initiate contact with the examiner. This contact should be made at the beginning of the study term, and not towards the end of the term close to the examination period. The initial contact between director and examiner should include a discussion of the following topics: the choice of materials, the amount of materials to be covered in a given term, the time for the examinations, the procedures and conditions for administering the examinations, as well as financial arrangements covering the fee and the travel and lodging expenses incurred by the examiners.

The choice of materials may be made by the director upon recommendation by NASILP, based on experience in using suitable materials in similar university programs. In such a case, the director needs to

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inform the examiner as to what materials are being used in the course, and to make sure that the examiner is either familiar with these materials, or has plenty of time to familiarize himself/herself with them. The director may want to consult with the examiner and ask him/her to recommend study materials. In such a case, the director must make sure that the examiner understands the nature and the needs of SILP with its emphasis on practical control of the target languages, which often is quite different than the emphasis put in language instruction which takes place in a traditional setting.

The decision as to how many credits should be awarded for the material covered during the term of study is too often an internal matter decided upon before consultation with the examiner. There are problems which have arisen consequently and eventually should be addressed. Since SILP is offered in accredited universities and colleges, the granting of credits should conform to the standards set by these institutions. An examiner can indeed be very helpful to the director in making such decisions. Directors are not experts in the languages offered through SILP and cannot be expected to make all decisions independently. It is necessary to understand the text being used, the difficulty of the units, and what constitutes a reasonable minimum as well as maximum of study to be covered in a given amount of time, and to be awarded a particular number of credits. While students can offer a very important feedback in this area, they should not be totally relied on as a guide, and should not be expected to make decisions of this nature. There are overzealous students who like to cover a lot of material, and

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often end up doing too much but not fully mastering any of the units of study. There are also students who regard any self-instruction program as an "easy" program to which minimum attention is paid during the semester, and they tend to set unreasonable low goals for themselves, such as covering two units in an entire semester, which could be easily completed in two or three weeks. Very definite decisions must be set in terms of the number of units which constitute minimum and maximum goals right at the beginning of the term in consultation with the examiner.

The setting of such a definite number of units to be covered in a given semester, is also very helpful to the examiner. If an individual examiner is expected to test students' performance in several levels of language learning, it is easier to cope with three or four sets of tests which are administered to students at different levels, than to have to manipulate 12-15 different sets of examinations. Flexibility can be built into programs to accommodate students who are very ambitious, as well as those who, for whatever reasons, do not wish to cover a lot of material, and the credits granted can be adjusted according to the number of units covered. Students can be offered, for example, the choice of covering the first five units in a given textbook, or the first eight units. Two sets of examinations can be composed and administered. However, the absence of any clear guidelines in this area can often result in a great deal of confusion and difficulty in administering the examinations.

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Deciding on the time at which these examinations are administered is an important issue as well. Most examiners have teaching schedules which are demanding, but if contacted early enough can find a mutually agreeable time for giving the examinations. Conditions during the examinations should be discussed by the director and examiner as well. Examiners should not be expected to test more than 8-10 students per day, as it is difficult to keep one's alertness and attention for any longer. The financial arrangements should be taken care of by the director, who can expect to pay the examiner the standard consultation fee for examiners and other consultants. Arrangements should be made before the arrival of the examiner, and should be very businesslike. The experience of some examiners has been very poor in this area, as some directors are very negligent in attending to such matters.

The language examiner can also have a valuable input on the choice of native speakers as tutors for SILP. There are times when a SILP director may wish to check the competence of a tutor who is being employed for the first time in such a program. It is possible to arrange for a telephone interview of the tutor by the examiner. The examiner can determine in a short time the degree of competence of a particular tutor. The examiner can also discuss the course materials with the tutor, and further explain to him/her what the function of the examiner is and what type of an examination can be expected. Contact between tutor and examiner can thus be very beneficial, especially when a new tutor is involved.

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Early contacts between director and examiner, as well as tutor and examiner, can thus be very helpful in setting up a program as well as in arranging for the final examination, but most important is the preparation of the students. It is necessary to prepare them not only by making sure that they study the assigned materials, but by disseminating adequate information about the nature of the examination. The examination, which is largely an oral test, is designed to test the students' familiarity with the materials assigned to them for the course of study. It should be made clear to the students that no additional knowledge is expected from them, and that, by the same token, the test does not address itself to examining other contexts not included in the course. Skills that will be looked for are listening-comprehension, production of correct sentences, fluency, pronunciation, and whenever agreed upon, also some reading and writing skills. The ease of use of new vocabulary and structures are tested throughout the examination. To demonstrate what procedures are used to test the above skills, it is advisable to have a sample examination available for students at all levels. The procedures illustrated by the sample are not necessarily always followed by the examiner, but are representative of the type of activities which take place during the examination.

A sample examination for the first level of Modern Hebrew is included in the appendix, and it consists of seven parts. The first part is an informal conversation based on the vocabulary learned in the first five units of Lessons in Modern Hebrew (Edna Amir-Coffin, The University of Michigan, 1974). This conversation allows the student and examiner

some time to get acquainted, as well as serves as a measure of the student's ability to understand and respond to basic questions in Hebrew. The second component in the examination consists of situations (only one is offered in the same as an example) in which the students have to respond within a given context. A set of sentences defines the situation, and the student is directed as to how to respond to each set of circumstances. These situations are based on the vocabulary of the lessons, and are designed in a similar pattern to the situations presented in the dialogues of the lessons. The third part of the examination has been found to be a very valuable tool for testing comprehension and production: it is a set of unrelated questions to which the students have to respond immediately. The responses have to be spontaneous and instantaneous. Most of the questions relate to the stories or dialogues presented in the book, and can be answered in terms of the content of the book. However, adventurous students often go beyond the book and create their own context in answering the questions.

The fourth component is designed to test specific grammatical points. It is a highly structured part of the examination, and elicits very specific types of information. Features such as agreement, verb conjugation, use of adverbs and adjectives, use of correct prepositions, and other features are tested in this manner. The fifth part of the examination concentrates on testing the students' comprehension of larger contexts and not just individual sentences. A couple of short taped selections are played for the students. These selections can be

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taken directly from the book, or may be especially composed for the examination, resembling similar passages in the book. Students may hear each passage two or three times. After each passage, they are asked a number of questions, either verifying certain facts, or eliciting information about the passage. They do not see the text, they only hear it read at a normal speed.

Students of Modern Hebrew in most SILP studies are required to learn the basics of reading and writing as well, so these skills are tested also. Students are asked to read a short passage from the book, and are asked to answer questions about that passage in writing (the text is available to them).

The last component is an optional one, which involves a direct translation of a short passage from English to Hebrew. This is a difficult task for beginners, and is usually given to the more advanced students.

Students who see the sample test know exactly what to expect at the end of the term. They will not know the specific questions that they will be asked, but they will know what form the examination will take, and what types of skills and structures will be examined.

Just as it is important for the students to know something about the examiner and the examination, it is helpful for the examiner to have some background information about the students. In preparation for the examination, the director should see to it that some background information is compiled on each student. A questionnaire can be filled out by students giving pertinent information about their academic background

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as well as reasons for participating in SILP. It is advisable to administer the Modern Languages Aptitute Test and have that information available to the examiner as well.

These preparations on the part of all participants in SILP will help to achieve a successful completion of the course by the students, and minimize the often unrealistic fears in the face of a one determining examination at the end of the course.

Edna Amir Coffin
Ann Arbor, 1975.

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APPENDIX

Sample Test in Modern Hebrew

(based on first five units of
Lessons in Modern Hebrew, Level I, Part I
Edna Amir-Coffin
University of Michigan, 1974)

PART I

Informal Questions: IN HEBREW

1. What is your name?
2. What are you doing in New York?
3. Are you a student at New York University?
4. What are you studying?
5. Where does your family live?
6. Is X close to/ far from New York?
7. Where do you live in New York?
8. How do you get to the university?
9. Where do you eat? Is the food good?
10. Do you know many people in New York?
11. Do you like the city? etc....

PART II

Situation IN ENGLISH

1. (You see Jonathan in the street) ask him from where he is coming and to where he is going.

2. (He tells you he is coming from the beach and going home. He wants to know where you are working). Tell him that you work at the newspaper "Ha'aretz".

3. (He tells you that he works there too). Ask him what he does. Ask him if he writes articles for Ha'aretz.

4. (He tells you that he is a crime reporter). Ask him if the work is interesting.

5. (He asks you about your brother Zvi). Tell him that Zvi works for Kol Yisrael.

6. (He wants to know what he does there). Tell him that Zvi reads news in the morning.

7. (He asks him if Zvi just reads the news or also prepares the news). Tell him that he writes news and reads news.

PART III

Questions and Answers IN HEBREW

1. Where is Rina going?

2. Who are you writing to?

3. What are you writing?

4. What newspaper does Yossi read?

5. Where is your apartment located?

6. Do you know Mrs. Zahavi?

7. Where does she work?

8. Who works at the bank?

9. What is Ron doing at the hospital?

10. Who is Zvi visiting in the kibbutz?

11. Is the new book interesting?

12. Do you know Ron Cohen?

13. Is Rina a friend of Ron's? Does he know here?

14. Where is the bus to the beach?

15. What's Zvi's last name?

16. Who is this man?

PART IV

Grammatical Structure (examples only) IN HEBREW

a. infinitive

examiner: we live in Tel Aviv. Student: We plan to live in Tel Aviv.

examiner: Dan is writing a book. Student: Dan plans to write a book.

b. prepositions

examiner: house; university

student: The house is located next to the university.

The house is located far from the university.

The house is located close to the university.

c. adjectives and predicateds (definite and indefinite)

examiner: house; big

studnet: a big house

the big house

the house is big

d. demonstrative pronoun: in phrase and as subject of sentence

examiner: house; big houses; big

student: this house is big these houses are big

this is a big house these are big houses

e. gender and number features in verb

examiner: introduce Yoram to Esther, and Esther to Yoram, and both to your parents

student: Esther, meet Yoram.

Yoram, meet Esther.

Yoram and Esther, meet my parents -- Mom and Dad, meet Yoram and Esther.

examiner: Yonatan likes to tell stories.

examiner: Sarah. student: Sarah likes to tell stories.

examiner: I. student: I like to tell stories.

f. Forming questions

examiner: Ron lives in Netanya. Student: Where does Ron live?

examiner: Ruti is coming from the library:
Student: Where is Ruti coming from?

examiner: Dalia is learning Hebrew. Student: What is Dalia learning?

examiner: No. We are not planning to be home.
Student: Are you planning to be home?

PART V

Taped passages IN HEBREW

בשעור לאנגלית

א. משה מזרחי מספר: אני לומד אנגלית. הספר משעמם. המורה משעמם. השעור משעמם. אז מה אני עושה בשעור? אני מדבר ומדבר... המורה מלמד ומספר סיפורים באנגלית. ואני מדבר ומספר סיפורים בעברית. המורה מלמד, אבל אני לא לומד. אני לא מבין שעורים, ואני לא מבין אנגלית.

PART VI

Reading and Writing IN HEBREW

יונתן עובד בעיתון "הארץ". הוא כותב מאמרים בעיתון. הוא עובד במשרד. מה הוא עושה? הוא קורא עיתונים, שומע חדשות וכותב מאמרים. העבודה מעניינת, העיתון מעניין והמאמרים מעניינים.

(1) שאלות תוכן:

א. איפה עובד יונתן?

ב. מה הוא כותב?

ג. באיזה עיתון הוא כותב?

ד. מה הוא עושה בעבודה?

PART VII

Translation IN ENGLISH

Jonathan is busy. He is reading an interesting newspaper. He is reading Ma'ariv. Rina is also busy. She is writing a letter to Zvi's mother. Zvi's mother is busy. She is going to the bank. She works in the bank. She runs to work. At work she is not busy. She writes letters, reads the newspaper and listens to music.